

# Garbage Gazette

Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection

Volume 21, No. 3

April 2002

## CT Reported MSW Recycling Rate Drops for FY2000

Recycling figures reported by municipalities for FY2000 indicated that CT’s reported “recycling/source-reduction” rate dropped from 25% in FY99 - to 24% in FY2000. This is the first time in the eight years since DEP has been keeping track of the state’s recycling rate based on the annual reports submitted by the municipalities that the reported recycling rate has decreased. Factors that potentially might have affected the rate include: a growing economy in 1999/2000 which may have resulted in increased disposal tonnages; decrease in weight but not necessarily number of beverage containers reported recycled (due to glass being replaced by lighter material such as plastic – see explanation below); low recycling collection rates for some materials such as the “away from home use” beverage containers; and decreased recycling promotion.

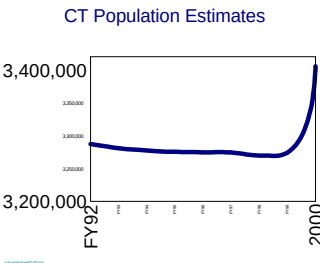
As has been the case for years, the municipally “reported” recycling/source reduction rate belies or underestimates the actual recycling rate.<sup>1</sup>

### FY2000 vs FY1999 Reported MSW Data

|          | Reported Recycled |                  | Reported Disposed |                  | Population              |
|----------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
|          | Tons              | Tons/Person/Year | Tons              | Tons/Person/Year |                         |
| FY1999   | 749,780           | 0.2290           | 2,417,864         | 0.7385           | 3,274,069 (estimate)    |
| FY2000   | 741,076           | 0.2176           | 2,491,465         | 0.7316           | 3,405,465 (2000 census) |
| % Change | 1% decrease       | 5% decrease      | 3% increase       | 1% decrease      | 4% increase             |

### TRENDS

**Population** – From 1991 on, yearly estimates of CT’s population (by the CT Department of Public Health - DPH) have been used to calculate recycling and disposal per capita estimates. Those population estimates indicated a decreasing trend in CT’s population between July 1991 and July 1997. However the 2000 US census population count, which was used to calculate the per capita estimates for FY2000 indicated a 4% population increase over the July 1998 estimate. These population trends affect the per capita recycling and disposal rates; per capita recycling rates dropped more than did reported recycling tonnages.



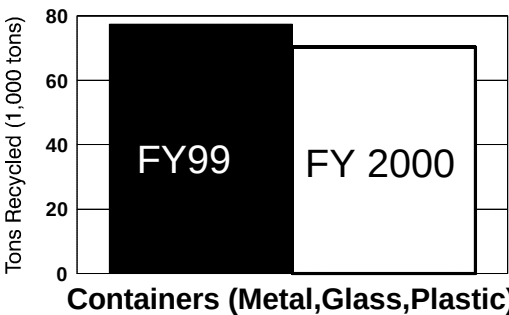
### Amounts of MSW Recycled in FY2000 – As Reported by CT Municipalities\*

| Material Reported Recycled          | FY99 (tons) | FY2000 (tons) | Ton Diff | Ton% Diff | FY99 PPY** | FY2000 PPY | PPY Diff | PPY % Diff |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|---------------|----------|-----------|------------|------------|----------|------------|
| Auto Maintenance Materials          | 3,788       | 3,197         | -591     | -1.56%    | 2.31       | 1.88       | -0.43    | -18.6%     |
| ***Containers (Metal,Glass,Plastic) | 77,380      | 70,412        | -6,968   | -9.00%    | 47.27      | 41.35      | -5.92    | -12.52%    |
| Organics                            | 236,124     | 232,039       | -4,085   | -1.73%    | 144.24     | 136.27     | -7.97    | -5.5%      |
| Other Recyclables                   | 123         | 261           | +138     | +112.2%   | 0.08       | 0.15       | +0.07    | +87.5%     |
| ***Paper                            | 353,480     | 360,091       | +6,611   | +1.87%    | 215.93     | 211.48     | -4.45    | -2.06%     |
| Scrap Metal (not including cans)    | 61,644      | 61,469        | -175     | -0.28%    | 37.66      | 36.10      | -1.56    | -4.1%      |
| Textiles (Clothing, Carpets, etc)   | 1,375       | 980           | -395     | -28.7%    | 0.84       | 0.58       | -0.26    | -31.0%     |

<sup>1</sup> There is actually more recycling going on than is evidenced by the reported numbers - i.e. we are not getting numbers on material recycled through the bottle bill infrastructure, commercially recycled scrap metal, commercially recycled waste oil, storage batteries returned and recycled through the CT battery deposit system, commercial material recycled directly to mills or through central warehouses and distribution centers, etc. So our actual recycling/source reduction rate is probably closer to 29% than 24%.

As can be seen from the table above, reported tonnages recycled for FY2000 as compared to FY99 (1) slightly increased for “other recyclables” and paper and (2) decreased for containers, organics, scrap metal, and textiles. However, the increased state population resulted in a **decreased per capita rate** for all materials.

The greatest tonnage **decrease** was indicated by the reported **container recycling tonnages** [70,412 tons (41 PPY) in FY2000 as compared to 77,380 tons (47 PPY) in FY99]. This 9% tonnage decrease (13% PPY decrease) appears to be the primary reason for the overall decrease in CT’s recycling tonnages. As has been the case in the past years, decreasing container recycling tonnages are probably at least in part attributable to the decrease in the percentage of glass in the container waste stream. Glass is being replaced by lighter packaging material such as plastic and aluminum. A recent EPA MSW study indicated that in 1980 glass packaging was 9.2% of MSW generation, declining to 4.8% in 1999 – a reduction of 4.4%. Since the CT recycling tonnages do not include material recycled through Connecticut’s bottle bill infrastructure (such as beer bottles) – the effect of glass replacement on container recycling tonnages is even more exaggerated.



**Improving Connecticut’s Recycling Rate**

The lighter weight food and beverage containers somewhat mitigates the implication of a lower CT recycling rate. However, our per capita recycling rates all decreased, and we still have not reached the mandated 40% recycling/source reduction goal (even if we count the unreported recyclables).

DEP is implementing various strategies to help increase Connecticut’s recycling rate – such as actively encouraging the establishment of programs to compost source separated organic materials (SSOM) from commercial and institutional generators; promotion of PAYT/unit-based-pricing trash disposal programs; and increased recycling enforcement. But we (everyone in Connecticut) need to do more to: (1) improve the overall recycling participation rate; (2) ensure that small businesses are recycling; (3) improve collection and recycling efforts for those recyclable materials which may be escaping the current recycling infrastructure (such as containers generated in the “away from home” setting) and (4) increase the purchase of recycled content products. **Everyone, state and local government, institutions, businesses, and residents need to be actively working to improve Connecticut’s recycling rate.**

Connecticut has come a long way in realizing a successful recycling program – but needs to do better. A closing thought from an article which appeared in the June 2001 *Resource Recycling* magazine “... **research shows that no other single change could be made to recycling programs that would increase the percentage recycled more than adding a variable rate/pay-as-you-throw program.**”

\*Not corrected for residue, does not include additional material included in totals on table above entitled “FY2000 vs FY1999 MSW Data” i.e. precombustion metal recycled from the MidCT RRF; undeliverable-bulk-business-mail recycled by US Postal Service; additional organics composted through Fairfield TS, etc  
\*\*PPY=Pounds/Person/Year  
\*\*\* Material reported as “bottles/cans/paper” were counted as 65% “paper”; 35% “containers”

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Meg Enkler, Waste Management Bureau/Recycling  
STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION  
79 Elm Street  
Hartford, CT 06106-5127  
<http://dep.state.ct.us>

BULK RATE  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
PERMIT No. 4313  
Hartford, CONN